

December 17, 1952

Dr. F. J. Ryan  
Department of Zoology  
Columbia University  
New York 27, N.Y.

Dear Francis:

The library here finally disinterred its copy of the Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Thank you for your offer to send me yours; it will not be necessary after all. I must admit that I am left only with the conviction that the only method of measuring mutation rates is in the chemostat, barring an unwonted amount of work. I agree with your conclusion that it is somewhat surprising that the experimental distributions of numbers of mutants agree with the idealized model as well as they do.

I cannot make any suggestions on your projected plâmonie to Nature anent Grigg. It is clearly put, and meets the issues. I sometimes wonder at what point one should forbear from replying to irrational controversy. That point has been passed with Hinshelwood, as far as I can see--- there's no discussion with him on general principles, especially after your last note in JGM. My own resolution is to ignore his nonsense, though there might be some value in clearing up his own experimental examples. I was impressed on re-reading Valery-Radot's Life of Pasteur, how much time he wasted beating dead horses!

What was the drift of your remark on Boston? I had to make a hurried trip, flying in one day, back the next, or none at all and am very sorry not to have been able to make an occasion to see you. It occurred to Esther and myself that we know hardly anyone now living still in New York --- her folks, the Ryans et al at Columbia, Zinder, Davis....

The genetic analysis of phase variation seems to be holding up, though the story is not complete yet. The "activated locus" may be interpreted in various ways--- for example, its stability in a given state may depend on a cycle from nucleus to cytoplasm to nucleus, a notion that would bring this fairly close to Sonneborn's antigens. All of this is purely hypothetical. Perhaps more interesting, I was ~~amused~~ surprised to find that in at least one system the plaque-forming ability of phage could be almost completely destroyed with scarcely any impairment of transduction. This raises the possibility of investigating the potential transducing abilities of "typical" phages like T2. Tom seems to find life here reasonably pleasant--- as you say, perhaps this is why you've heard less from him.

Sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg